

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 STUDENT HANDOUT, LESSON 8

THEME: WHO? ME? RUN FOR OFFICE?

"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right."
(Henry Ford)

"Leadership, like swimming, cannot be learned by reading about it."
(Henry Mintzberg)

There is consensus across the generations that for democracy to renew itself there must be a commitment on the part of each new generation. New leaders must arise to become "change agents" who will "walk the talk" of the American dream. Young people have stepped forward in the past and they must continue to do so for the reasons voiced above.

This activity will acquaint you with the opportunities, requirements and timelines of seeking elected office so you might not only consider but also plan for the possibility.

The first thing is to realize that you have a whole range of elected positions available to you as a potential candidate. You will find that all offices require you to be a U.S. citizen at least 18 years old and that some offices have unique requirements.

At the federal level, you can run for the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate and U.S. President/Vice President. The first office requires that your residence be in the district for which you are a candidate, you be at least 25 years old, and you have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years. The Senate requires that you live in the state of your election, be at least 30 years old, and have been a U.S. citizen for at least nine years. The Presidency is for those 35 years or older who have been U.S. citizens since birth.

However, why wait until age 25? Once you are 18 years of age, a buffet of choices awaits your candidacy at the state level. Let's investigate these options!

ACTIVITY:

Go to www.vote.wa.gov. In the upper left, find "Elections Menu" and scroll your cursor down to "Seeking Office." When the menu appears to the right, click on "Elective Office Descriptions." Now, seek answers to these questions:

Questions:

1. How many statewide, non-judicial, non-legislative offices are you eligible to file for when you turn 18 years old?
2. What are the last four offices listed above the section on Judicial Offices?
3. In the description of each office, you see the option to "Click here to see the current ____."
4. What are the two common requirements to seek the office of State Representative or State Senator?

There are the elected positions available at an even more local level; e.g., county, city, school district, water district, conservation district or, yes, even cemetery district. You can find these in two ways. Let's try both!

Go to www.vote.wa.gov and on the left column about mid-page select "Elections and Voting." Look down the left column and click on "Offices Subject to Election." On the right side of this page, look for and click on "For information on local offices that are up for election this year, contact your county auditor or elections department."

Here you will find a list of counties and their web sites through which you can obtain information about elected offices, from the county to the very local level. For example, click on the "Yakima County" web site, then on the left select "Elected Officials." Near the top, notice there are county offices but also city & town, school district and fire district offices.

Questions:

5. In Yakima County, how many elected Fire District Commissioner positions are there in total, AND what is the length of a term for this position?

6. Besides county offices, what other categories of elected office at a more local level would be an option for you when you decide to seek public office?

There is one relatively unknown office available to you at a VERY local level, that of Precinct Committee Officer for your favorite political party. The Precinct Committee Officer (PCO) is the neighborhood representative of his or her party. A precinct consists of up to 900 registered voters, or as many as 540 households. PCOs are elected in the November General Election on even years. A PCO's specific responsibilities are few, but the possibilities are many. A PCO chairs the precinct caucus every two years, and helps elect officers of the local party organization.

PCOs are especially important today because it provides you with an opportunity to voice your opinions about candidates or issues. This office is the grassroots politics, that everyone so fondly refers to, where reform of politics at the state and national level begins. It is also a great way to start as a candidate. If you decide to be a PCO, you will file for office like any other candidate and your name will be on the ballot. To explore this option, go to www.vote.wa.gov and under "Elections Menu" position your cursor on "Contacts." When the menu appears to the right, click on "Political Parties," then contact the major party of your choice.

You have learned some ways to determine your candidacy options in the future and you have seen SOME of the offices "up for grabs." Your County Auditor/Elections Official is just a phone call or email away when you want to explore the entire list of offices.

It is equally important to know that once a citizen decides to seek an elected position, there are some special dates and processes that he or she needs to heed. Here is an introduction to the process of seeking an elected position.

Go to www.vote.wa.gov to begin the process. You have to file your Declaration and Affidavit of Candidacy Form first, so let's look at what's called "Filing Week." Under the "Elections Menu," move to "Seeking Office" and on the menu that appears to the right, click on "Filing Procedures." On the page "Candidate Filing Procedure," locate "Additional Information" and click on "Procedures for Filing for Elective Office." Now, look for the answers to these questions:

Questions:

7. Clicking on the first bullet (Declaration...), where would a candidate for PCO obtain the necessary filing form?
8. Clicking on "When to File," is the filing period for the office of PCO shorter or longer than for state and county offices?
9. What is the beginning date for filing your candidacy for ANY office?
10. Clicking on "Where to File," if you are seeking a City Council, School Board or PCO position, where will you file your Declaration of Candidacy Form?
11. Clicking on "Filing Fees," what is the filing fee for A) the office of PCO? B) an elected position that is paid \$50,000 annually?
12. Clicking on "Indigent Candidates," what is the alternative to the filing fee if you can't afford to pay it?

Return to www.vote.wa.gov and "Elections Menu," move to "Seeking Office" and on the menu that appears to the right, click on "Minor Party Procedures." You will see that a process is in place for minor political parties and independent candidates to get on the ballot. They still must adhere to the procedures for "Filing Week" in July of an election year.

Congratulations! You now also understand where and when to obtain and file the form for your candidacy if you decide to become part of the democratic solution! You know where to locate information (www.vote.wa.gov) on fees, exceptions and anything you may have forgotten.